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## **USAID-Sponsored Innovation Featured in the Africa Green Revolution Forum**

Story by Joan Lewa, USAID/Kenya

SOKOSHAMBANI, which means market-to-farm in Kiswahili, has implemented an innovative approach to small-scale potato farming in Kenya. The SOKOSHAMBANI SMS technology is being featured this week at the Africa Green Revolution Forum (AGRF2012) which is being hosted by Dr. Kofi Annan in Arusha, Tanzania.

Farmers in Narok County have suitable weather for planting potatoes year round, harvesting 45 sacks per acre on average. “I started potato farming in year 2000. The difference is that now we have a ready market and don’t suffer like before. We used to sale a sack of potatoes for \$17.00 but now we sell at \$53.00 directly to the buyer and don’t have to wait for days to receive payment,” said farmer [James Radama](#).

SOKOSHAMBANI helps small-scale potato farmers access intelligence on market prices; access micro-finance institutions; order quality seeds and other inputs; access training materials; and most importantly, communicate directly with buyers from fast food restaurants. SOKOSHAMBANI’s strength is in its utilization of the use of the mobile communication platform in the country. There are 1,953 potato farmers from Narok and 17 hotels in Nairobi using the mobile-based platform linking the more than 150 kilometers between them.

“These two make a great team, building a great future for me,” said James smiling proudly as he held his mobile phone in one hand and potatoes in the other.

In Kenya, potatoes are considered the second staple food after maize - they are an extremely important crop involving nearly 800,000 farmers. The huge discrepancy between what farmers earn and the value of their produce at the market level is due to the many players in the potato marketing chain, chiefly middlemen who earn more than farmers.

To enable small-scale farmers’ access the high-yield seeds and their requisite inputs SOKOSHAMBANI, with support from USAID-funded Financial Inclusion for Rural Microenterprises (FIRM) project, deploys the use of micro-finance institutions and banks to finance farmers. The U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, known as Feed the Future, is helping to incubate and scale up innovations to help connect farmers to markets and to the information they need to grow more nutritious food. In partnership with the Government of Kenya and private sector counterparts, FIRM supports the goals of Feed the

Future by designing and enabling the adoption of sustainable financial services models that promote agriculture-led economic growth, improve livelihoods, and contribute to overcoming food insecurity. “We are grateful to USAID for the loan guarantees they are providing. This has enabled us to partner with banks like Faulu who are willing to give farmers loans; this would not have happened without USAID’s support,” said Stephen Kimiri, the developer of SOKOSHAMBANI.

Narok’s potato farmers now boast of improved livelihoods through innovative market-driven solutions. John Bonana boasts of having enough money to purchase foods to supplement his family’s nutrition. Like other farmers, John has invested his savings in income generating activities and intends to purchase more acreage to increase his potato production. Narok farmers’ success through adopting new innovations is not just a life transforming experience for them but a national model for securing the country’s food security. And for Kenya, it’s looking brighter every year.



*“Thanks to this innovation, I made enough savings and invested in purchasing a taxi. With the extra money coming in, I intend to purchase more land and increase my potato production,” said farmer John Bonana.*